CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER: Pat Young

INTERVIEWEE: Grace Hume

SUBJECT:

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TRANSCRIBER: Deborah M. Gill

Y: This is an interview with Grace Hume, Mrs. Rocky Hume, for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project, at Grace's Sportswear, 73614 Highway 111 in Palm Desert, on December 7 at 11:00 in the morning.

H: And, of course, the help had to have some place to eat so they came and ate at our place. So, we fed all of the help over there. They came for lunch and dinner. Well, anyway, then we got into this rag business, from riches to rags, you know? Accidently, some customers of ours had a store in Palm Springs, and they had a store in Laguna Beach, and there son-in-law was playing the races and not paying his bills so they went broke. So, the sheriff had the sale, so he went and bid on it and got the store, and got the merchandise. So then, we split and were in partnership for awhile here.

Y: With the sheriff?

H: No, no, he bought it from the sheriff. He bid on it and

got it, see?

Y: I see.

H: So, well, I don't know, it happened so sudden I haven't even given it any thought. Maybe two or three days would go by and I wouldn't even make a sale. It was just awful. I don't know what I was thinking about, but I stuck with it. I thought "if I get ten customers and they each spend ten dollars I will have a hundred dollars." In those days that was pretty good money. My husband said "we are not going to ever be any good, so sell it." No, I am determined. That is one thing about me--I am determined. In fact, if I would order merchandise, he would have a fit. "Oh, what are you doing? You are never going to sell that." So, I used to hide the darn merchandise from him. I would hide it in all the drawers all around the whole store. (laughter)

Y: (laughter)

H: That was funny. Well anyway, I stuck it out and here I am.

Y: That is great.

H: After thirty-two years.

Y: Now, what was he doing? Was he also running this Grace's Sportswear?

H: No, no. He had a job at Desert Airport Hotel. It wasn't airport then. He was a bar manager there for awhile.

Y: Where was that?

H: In Rancho Mirage. I think it is where the Marriott Hotel

is now. He was bar manager there for awhile until he retired.

Y: Tell us a little more about the Palm Desert Inn, what it was like inside and . . . .

H: You mean the Palm Village Inn?

Y: Palm Village Inn.

H: Oh. Well, it had just a tiny little bar, just a real nice, little, intimate bar. We made a lot of friends there. Of course, we knew we had to have good food to bring them out from Indio and Palm Springs. There were not enough people here. On this side it was built up, maybe five hundred people here. That is about all.

Y: By this side, do you mean . . . ?

H: The north side. So, while we had the inn, there was only one airport here. I think it was the Thermal Airport. We didn't serve breakfast. Once in awhile we did, for a few special people. So, there were these pilots from Thermal Airport, and they would call us up and say "there are going to be four of us, five of us, for breakfast. We will buzz you when we come around." So, they would fly over and buzz us, and land across the street, on the south side, where there was a runway. General Patton had his troops there before we got here, and it was sort of a runway, and they would land over there and then walk over. Gee, when I think about that it just gives me the chills, really. And then, there was a windmill that used to go around. It was so quiet. Maybe around ten o'clock at

night when everything quieted down, we would go outside on the front lawn and listen to this windmill go round and round. I think it is still there, although I am not sure. I think it is, but you couldn't hear it now. Oh, those were some days, I'll tell you.

Y: Where was the windmill?

H: I believe it is near the Desert Resort, up in that direction. I have seen it once since. I think it is still there, and I think it is probably on that property. I have to go over there and look it over.

Y: How many people were living in Palm Village when you came here?

H: Well, I don't have the exact figure. I would say not more than five hundred, maybe not even that many. There were not too many homes here, on this side. So naturally, we bought over here because there was nothing to buy over there. In fact, there was no place to live. When they first opened the Palm Village Inn, we took an apartment in Cathedral City, because there was nothing here. The, we decided to move into the inn, in the office. Oh, I know what we did with the trailer. We put it in the back of the inn, and we gave it to our cook. We had women cooks then, and they were really good. This one woman was very good. Well, she occupied the trailer and we lived in the office in the inn, believe it or not. Oh, I tell you, it was something.

Y: For how long?

H: Gosh, I guess one season. We used to close in the summer when we were there.

Y: Did you build your house then over in Palm Village?

H: No. We bought some property on Santa Rosa Way, several lots and a couple of houses. Then, we started to build a little bit. This was in 1950, I think. So, we decided we wanted to buy another house, and we bought this little house and I am still in it. People wanted me to sell it and move to a bigger house but--see, I lost my husband five years ago--I just couldn't leave that house. I got so attached to it. It is my home, and cozy. It is not a large house, but I love it. I really do. So, that is where we are. (laughter) We, I say we, with my two little Chihuahuas.

Y: (laughter) How busy was it here? I mean, there weren't very many people, so, was there a lot going on in spite of that?

H: No, there wasn't really. There was a small grocery store and the gift shop, and that is about all. And then, who came after us? I can't remember because it has been over thirty years. Then, let's see, what was the next business after that? I can't think of it. Oh, then my husband and a few of the fellows here got together a fire department and my husband was the commissioner. I don't know what his duties were (laughter), but Bob ~~Ketty~~ Keedy, who has ~~Ketty's~~ Keedys Cafe over here, coffee shop, he was the chief. I remember my husband and I bought a big white fireman's hat for him. I wonder if he still has it? I tell you, in those days we

didn't even have a fire. (laughter) There were no homes around here to burn, I guess.

Y: I missed a little bit when you were telling about when you first came. Could you just repeat that again, you know, when you were ?

H: Oh, in San Francisco?

Y: Yes, and when you got here. I missed that on the tape.

H: Well, originally we were from Santa Monica, then, when the War broke out, we went up to San Francisco. We were offered these good jobs, so my husband went to the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco--a very famous hotel--and he was the bar manager at the officer's club. It is a large hotel and they have several floors and several bars. I was the hat check girl there. So, I think this was between Christmas and New Years that he got ill and got the flu, and it developed into arthritis, so we came down here. He had a nephew living in Palm Springs who said "come on down here because it will do you good. The weather is beautiful here and it will cure your arthritis." And, believe it or not, it did. See, it got it in the very beginning. I believe that most of the people here, that is, the people who first came here, came here for their health. I'll tell you, it is a wonderful climate, and it certainly helped him. So, that is how it all started.

Y: And then you moved in with this cousin?

H: No, we had a trailer. We had a trailer up in San Francisco. There was no place to live, and of course, the hotel was

filled and we couldn't get a place there. So, we lived in this trailer park--it's a travel trailer--and we brought the travel trailer down and moved it next to his nephew, in Palm Springs. We had it there for awhile, and then we went up to Idlewild and ran a restaurant and cocktail bar there. We did that for about a year, and then we came down here.

Y: What was the Palm Village Inn before you took it over?

H: It was always the Palm Village Inn.

Y: How long had it been there?

H: I have no idea. Well, when General Patton had his troops here, his tanks, this man who had a restaurant in Palm Springs ran it during that time, then he is the one that told us about the inn being for rent for someone to run it. I don't know. We weren't thinking, or something. I don't know what we were. (laughter) True pioneers, I guess. So, we came down and opened it up and did all right there.

Y: So, it had been closed for awhile?

H: Yes, yes. The license had been frozen. We rented for about a year and then we bought the building and all the property.

Y: So, when did you actually start the inn? In '44?

H: 1945, and we had it until 1947, and then we sold it.

Y: I heard quite a few people tell me that it had such a good reputation that the servicemen who were here during the war would come back afterwards.

H: That's right. Oh, we had a lot of celebrities too--movie stars, coming in there. My husband had this personality

that just kept people around. He was just one of those friendly type persons--Rocky. Everybody knows Rocky.

Y: And so, they would just come back, huh?

H: Oh yes, yes.

Y: Was it sort of the center for night life around here?

H: The only place. (laughter) There was no other. Well, I guess it was quite a novalty for people to drive out here from Palm Springs and Indio, because we did have good food. I knew we had to have good food to bring them out here, so we really put on a spread, I'll tell you. I think top sirloin was $3.00 for the whole dinner, imagine that? We specialized in chicken, steaks, chops, prime rib.

Y: I also understand that Grace's Sportswear is the oldest, first dress shop in the area.

H: That's right, that's right. We opened it up in 1947, and in a little store. It was owned by the Myers. K.C. Myers owned it, and we were there for fourteen years. The, we bought this lot here and built this building here. We built this in 1961. I am pretty sure it was 1961, and that is eighteen years ago--still here. (laughter) I don't know.

Y: Well, that must have been something. I mean, you must have been servicing all the people in the area here, in terms of clothing.

H: Well, that's right, what few people were here. And then, it kept growing and the people kept coming in and started building. Well, we were here before Cliff Henderson was.

As I said before, we used to feed their employees that were building the building.

Y: The building, do you mean . . . ?

H: The Shadow Mountain Club. And then, things started to move ahead. A lot of people joined the club, and bought property here and then started to build, so it just gradually came. The largest progress I have seen has been in the last, oh, I would say eight years. It has just doubled and tripled, the building and everything. It is amazing.

Y: That's right. You were saying you can't find your house now. (laughter)

H: No. I was looking when I went up in the airplane in the air watch. I was looking for my house, and thought sure I could spot it because it is a little different, you know. It has a little block wall around part of it, and then five Palm trees in a group, and then there is one by itself, but I couldn't distinguish it from the air. There were so many houses that looked like little cracker boxes. I couldn't believe it. I thought that when I went up in the air I would be sure to spot my house--no way.

Y: I understand you have been in the dress business before. This wasn't your first time at it.

H: No, not really, no. I worked in a dress shop and I modeled quite a bit, but I wasn't in the dress business. This was all rather new to me, just like the restaurant business was

fairly new. But, I'll try anything, you know. (laughter)

Y: Try and succeed.

H: (laughter) Well, I don't know. Sometimes I think everything is pure luck, really. What did I know about the dress business? I had worked in a dress shop, but I didn't know how to run one. I stuck it out because I am a very determined person, anyway. The more my husband fought against it, the more I was going to prove him wrong, you see? But, I wouldn't give anything in the world for this experience I have had. I haven't made an awful lot of money, but I have done all right.

Y: What kinds of things have changed over the years, other than the fact that it has become more crowded, certainly? What other things have changed?

H: Changed? Everything has changed, really. It has been so gradual that I just haven't noticed too many changes in the past years. I have noticed more changes in the last ten years say, in the building and everything, and of couse, El Paseo and how it has built up. Well naturally, we didn't want to buy a bunch of sand over there on the south side. I wouldn't mind having a few pebbles of that sand now. You just never know, do you?

Y: No, no. Has that changed the business over here? Do you find it has given you good compensation, or bad compensation?

H: Well, no, I think it is good, because my prices are very reasonable here compared to El Paseo's prices, and, of course, the high rents and everything. I have kept my

business the same as when I started, with the same low prices. I try to carry a little of everything, because I had to because I was the only shop here. In fact, I even put in mens' swim trunks when I was over in the little store because the women would come in and buy a swimsuit, and then they would have their husbands with them and would say "where does my husband get a swim-suit, swim trunks," and I would have to send then either to Indio or Palm Springs. So, I stocked some swim trunks, and so, I sold quite a few swim trunks. But, I didn't want to get into the mens' wear business.

Y: What is in that building now?

H: Let me think. I think it is the . . . the last I saw was that Wacky Wicker. I am pretty sure that was in the building that I occupied. The straw furniture, or rattan, or whatever it is called.

Y: Now, are people at that . . . are we talking about the fifties, when you started putting in mens's swim wear?

H: We started in 1947, so about '49 or '50, yes.

Y: Were people living here year-round, or were you open year-round?

H: I believe they were . . . no, we weren't open year around. We closed in the summer. In 1949, my nephew, the one that lived in Palm Springs, opened up a gambling casino up in Lake Tahoe, the north end of Lake Tahoe, and they called it the North Shore Club. We used to go up there every summer because my husband was one of the managers up there. So, we would close here at the end of May, go up there, and come

back right after Labor Day, and open the store again.

Y: Do you stay open year round now?

H: No, no.

Y: You never have?

H: Never have.

Y: Did most people during the late Forties and Fifties leave during the summer here?

H: Well, what few people were here, I think most of them stayed, really. But, as the town built up, there were a lot of people that closed, as the businesses came in. Well now, I don't know. The grocery stores and the drug store--we had one drug store here--they stayed open all year, but we never did.

Y: You said you had trouble getting people to help you when you were running the inn? What did they do when the season was up?

H: Do you mean the help we had? We didn't have much help. We would run it ourselves. That is why I sold it. We were just killing ourselves. If we did have help, there was no place to live here, so we couldn't have too much help. In fact, we had a dishwasher, and we used to have to go pick him up and take him back home again, in Indio. I tell you that trying to get help here, I don't know how we did as well as we did with the help we had to work with.

Y: What were the roads like?

H: Well, you know, speaking of thirty-two years ago, it is a little vague. I can't quite remember, but I believe there

was dirt road, yes. In the quiet of the evening, when sometimes we would close the inn early because sometimes business would stop around ten or so, we would drive up and down the highway--I guess it was dirt road then--and kill Sidewinders. (laughter) This was quite a sport for us. We made our own fun in those days because there was no place to go, unless you wanted to go clear into Palm Springs or Indio. So, we would drive up and down and we would see a Sidewinder, and we would run over it. Sometimes we would miss it, so we would back up and run over it again. We thought the more Sidewinders we killed, the better off everybody would be, see? I tell you, that was one sport we used to participate in. Now, speaking of Indian Wells, what an exclusive place that is now. That was something else. They had two little beer joints there, and a little grocery store, and a little trailer park. This wasn't the best district in the world. It was . . .oh, I don't know, I hate to say what I thought it was, but who would ever think it would ever develop into what it did. It is amazing. It is something else again. It is the most exclusive place around here, and it was the worst--believe me. There was nothing, nothing there, nothing. I think we could have bought that grocery store for a thousand dollars, but then, we weren't interested in the grocery business, just dispensing food.

Y: What else did you do for entertainment? Obviously, the inn took up most of your time.

H: Well, we worked, and by the time we got through were pretty tired and there wasn't anything we wanted to do. We had just about had it, you know? Well, it was entertaining to run that inn because the people were so nice. We had some people come in that had a small baby, and they used to come in--I guess they couldn't get a babysitter--and lay their little baby on our bed in our office where we lived. All those kids are all grown up now, believe me.

Y: Who was that with the baby?

H: It was Bob ~~Kettie~~ Keedy's and, I think, his little daughter--yes. We made a lot of friends here.

Y: After your husband finished working at Angelos, where did he . . . ?

H: Oh, he didn't work at Angelos. He worked at the Desert Air Hotel and they had the airport there.

Y: Oh, right.

H: He was the bar manager there for several years, after we sold the inn. Of course, I had the dress business then. (laughter) He didn't want any part of that.

Y: Did he retire after working at the . . . ?

H: He retired, oh, I can't remember the exact year. He worked there for about fourteen years and then retired.

Y: So, you moved over to this building when?

H: Let's see. We started to build it in 1960, about the middle of 1960, and in 1961 the building was completed and we moved here in July of 1961.

Y: What was around here?

H: Well, the building next door was a motel, and then Del Ganyon bought the building and turned it into offices. He was just the real estate man next door. This was an empty lot here. Gosh, there was nothing here--nothing really. Let's see. There was the Myers' building up the street here. He had three little stores and we occupied one of them. That's about all, really. I wish I had made notes in those days, just so I could remember cause I didn't know this was going to come up after thirty-two years, or thirty-four years. Gee.

Y: You were talking about the airport over in Rancho Mirage. Was that used for planes, for small engine planes, after the Thermal one?

H: No, no, the Thermal was still operating. That was a little private airport and Hank Goverty owned it. I am not quite sure, but I think when they were building the Shadow Mountain Club, I guess Cliff Henderson brought in some barracks. Do you know the barracks the soldiers used to use? Hank Goverty bought them all up and moved them over on his property and built around them. He made some beautiful little units there. So, that was such an interesting place. We would sit in there, in the dining room, and watch the planes come in and take off, and it was so interesting. I loved it.

Y: What were these units used for?

H: Motel rooms.

Y: Oh.

H: Or hotel. We called it the hotel. The Desert Air Hotel, he called it.

Y: Well, how long was the Desert Air Hotel, how long was that there, in the airport?

H: Oh, my goodness, let me think. Oh, about eighteen years, I'd say, or twenty years. That was another fun place. There weren't too many places around then.

Y: When was it built? Around '47 or so?

H: Let me think. I think it was later than that. The people that were building his place came over to the inn to eat too, so, it was built after the Shadow Mountain Club was built. The Shadow Mountain Club was built in, I think, 1946, so, this was between 1946 and 1947 that the Desert Air was being built.

Y: Were there enough people around to use the airport and take advantage of the facilities?

H: Oh, yes. People used to fly in for lunch from Los Angeles, so it caught on real good. Of course, Palm Springs was pretty well established too, and of course, it wasn't too far go from Palm Springs to Rancho Mirage.

Y: Were there any other hotels in the area at the time, or was that the closest one?

H: No, that was it. The Shadow Mountain Club was not a hotel or a motel. I think the first motel here was the Sage and Sun. Now, where the Gulf Station is on the corner of San Luis Rey and the frontage road, that is where the Sage and Sun was. We saw that being built, and we saw it being

torn down, and then they put in that Gulf Station there. That was the first motel here.

Y: Who owned it?

H: I can't think of the name now. No, I can't think of the name.

Y: What kind of people would come here and stay in the Sage and Sun? Would they stay very long?

H: No, just maybe on weekends. I don't know. It certainly seemed to do all right. I wish I could remember their name. The first drugstore here was Ed Mullens, and he opened it up right across the street from here.

Y: And he stayed all year around.

H: Oh yes. Then, I guess, the gas station opened up here, and I don't know who was the first one.

Y: Once you were out of the inn and you had more time, what did people in the area, in the Fifties and Sixties do for entertainment? I mean, obviously some were involved . . . .

H: Well, we sold the inn and the people operated it, you know, took off where we left off, so they had the inn to go to, and that was it here. It was the only eating place here, the only restaurant. It was so many years ago, I can't remember all.

Y: (laughter) What intrigued you about the desert and kept you here?

H: Well, (laughter) I guess determination, and I could see a future here. I have always had foresight, thank goodness. Well, when our roots were here, we bought property here and

we were here then, let's face it. For one thing, I always wanted to get in on the ground floor in some little town. Now, like my mother and father came here, and he came into some money and she wanted to buy on Spring Street in Los Angeles, and my father said "no, this town will never be any good." So, they went to San Gabriel and bought a ranch. So, I used to hear my mother talk about that, how she wished they had bought on Spring Street, and that always stuck in my mind and I thought if I ever got the chance, I was going to get in on the ground floor, and, I think I did. We bought this property and built the building. It was only the second or third building here, I think this is.

Y: Do you remember much about Palm Village and who started it or why?

H: Well, there were some people by the name of, it was called the Mollin Company, that developed this Palm Village side here, and then I guess when the war came along it stopped everything, so it didn't go ahead until after we bought the inn and then things started growing. Then, Cliff Henderson came and built the Shadow Mountain Club, and then sold off the property here on the south side. It was called Palm Village, then he changed it to Palm Desert.

Y: Where there any remains or signs of Patton's encampment over there when you first came?

H: No, just nothing but sand, just sand, and a few runways. You know, where the dirt had been piled, that is where the planes used to land, across the street from the inn,

but there was nothing there, nothing but the windmill.

Y: Who would use it? What was it there for?

H: I don't know. I really don't know. There must have been somebody using it.

Y: Yes.

H: And I believe it is still there. I don't know, because I haven't been over there for so long, that I wouldn't know where to find it now, but I have an idea it is near the desert reserve over in that direction.

Y: What was Rancho Mirage like?

H: Not much there. I don't believe there was a business there. Not until the last fifteen or twenty years, I don't believe there was hardly any business. I don't think there was even a grocery store there. No, I don't think so.

Y: Were there many people living there?

H: Well, there were people living there that had more than one home, and this was their second home. They didn't stay there all year, but just came for a visit, maybe a week or two weeks at a time. I guess they couldn't support a business in Rancho Mirage in those days. But, I don't remember very much going on in Rancho Mirage. In fact, I am surprised it went ahead like it did. In the last few years it has really gone right ahead.

Y: It is interesting then that someone would have the foresight to build the Desert Air Hotel there, in a place that must have looked pretty vacant.

H: Yes, well, Hank Gogerty built that. He was an architect and

I guess he like the desert, and came here and saw the possibilities. Somebody has to do something, you know, start something.

Y: People who were living there, were there mainly ranches, or, what was . . . ?

No, no, it was just called Rancho Mirage and there were nice homes. I believe the lots were quite large, about half acre lots, and I think they are still like that--half acres.

Y: You've shown me a photograph of Palm Village and it had date groves or something in the background.

H: Right.

Y: Was there some agriculture going on here?

H: Oh my, there were grapefruit groves, and date palms.

Y: Where?

H: Well, in the back of our house, the house that I live in now, there was a grapefruit grove. In fact, when we bought the property, we bought the house and lot, and another lot besides. We had ten trees on the two lots. They left the trees in between. You know, they built in the grove, and then, in the back of our house was nothing but grapefruit groves--no houses. The coyotes used to have their lair there. They would dig out the ground under the grapefruit trees and that is where they would sleep. Finally, they subdivided it and took out a lot of the trees, but they left several trees in there. Everyone over there has several trees in their yard.

Y: When did they subdivide the area?

H: Well, I think we bought that property in 1953, and about 1955 they started to build in there. I remember the airplanes used to come by and . . . what do they call that when they spray the trees?

Y: Oh yes.

H: What do they call it? I can't even think of it. Oh dear, my memory is not so good any more. But, it used to frighten me because they would fly right over our house, and spray all the trees there. I was glad when that stopped.

Y: Who owned those groves?

H: I don't know. I don't know. I never did know. But, they are gradually disappearing, and the date groves.

Y: Do you remember when COD started?

H: Yes. I think I have a newspaper here. I think I have. Well, my husband bought this desk for me, and, every time I open one of the drawers it smelled like a skunk. I had a fit! I thought that smell would never go away, so I just raised the roof whenever I opened the drawer. So, one day, Ruth said "open your drawer. I think you have got a skunk in there." And this is what was . . . where is it?

Y: It is right behind the lamp there.

H: Here is what was in there. She had bought this little thing and put it in the drawer, so when I opened the drawer, there it was. (laughter)

Y: Now, who is Ruth?

H: My girl who works for me.

Y: How long has she been working for you?

H: Well, let me see. We have been friends for years, and she worked in the old store up the street here, I think for one year, now, seven years ago, she came to work here for me. So, she has been with me, altogether, about eight years. But, we have been friends for years. I can't find that College of the Desert . . . .

Y: Well, did you get any clientele from COD, when it started up?

H: Oh, not too much because I cater to the older woman, the more mature woman.

Y: So, most of the instructors there were young?

H: Oh, I got some of the . . . the college students I didn't get so much of, but the, they call it the . . . .

Y: Teachers, professors?

H: Yes, but there is another name for it.

Y: Administrators?

H: I am not thinking good this morning. I had a really bad night, couldn't sleep. It was one of those nervous, you know, half asleep and half awake.